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LOS ANGELES TIMES  
18 April, 1985

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# FBI Interviewed Americans Who Visited Nicaragua, Webster Says

By ROBERT L. JACKSON, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—FBI Director William H. Webster said Wednesday that his agents have sought out and interviewed about 100 Americans who have traveled to and from Nicaragua during the last two years.

But Webster, testifying before the House Judiciary subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights, denied charges by Democrats that the interviews represented harassment of U.S. citizens for visiting a country whose leftist government is opposed by the Reagan Administration.

"I can assure you there was a legitimate counterintelligence purpose for every interview," said Webster, who made the disclosures in response to questioning.

Webster did not reveal what the agents asked the travelers, but the queries are believed to have centered on the contacts they made in Nicaragua, what they were told and where they traveled.

Webster indicated that some of the interviews were conducted at the request of the CIA and the National Security Council. The CIA is prohibited by its charter from gathering intelligence within the United States. By law, the FBI is charged with protecting the United States domestically from the threat of foreign espionage.

Webster did not disclose when or where the interviews took place, but some subcommittee members said constituents had complained about being contacted by the FBI after returning from Nicaragua.

Associate FBI Director William M. Baker said after the hearing, "The mere travel to or from Nicaragua did not cause us to interview them."

Baker added that people were selected for interviews because of their experiences in Nicaragua and because of people with whom they may have been in contact while there.

"Part of our counterintelligence authority is to determine the capabilities, interests or activities of the Nicaraguan government," Baker said. "The persons interviewed were not necessarily subjects of investigation themselves."

Rep. John Conyers Jr. (D-Mich.) told Webster of a Detroit woman who had complained to him that

she was contacted by an FBI agent after returning from Nicaragua. The woman said the agent told her that everyone going to and from that country was questioned by the bureau, Conyers added.

Webster said that he was unaware of the case but that only 100 "of the thousands of people going back and forth to Nicaragua" had been contacted.

"I suppose anyone can take offense at the FBI making contact with them," Webster said. "But I have never grown up in an atmosphere where a visit by an FBI agent in and of itself was some kind of threat."

Conyers retorted: "An FBI agent's visit to a job, sir, can destroy a person's career with no

intention to harass or anything . . . Friendly visits from the FBI are no good. They're not welcome in our society."

California Rep. Don Edwards (D-San Jose), the subcommittee chairman, told Webster that "there are a lot of people in the executive department who would like to enlist the CIA or FBI on its side" in Administration efforts to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista regime.

Edwards, referring to President Richard M. Nixon's attempts to use the CIA and FBI to thwart investigation of the Watergate scandal, added, "There have been terrible things that have happened in the United States in the name of national security."